Clatsop County Historical Society Quarterly

CUMTUX

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CCHS Image #98.036. Reuben Jensen collection

Clamming by lantern light in Seaside. ca. 1940s

In This Issue ...

Two stories come from Seaside residents. Carol Birney brought us a story about professional clam diggers, a subject we've never covered before in about 172 issues of Cumtux. Her father, Lawrence Smith of Seaside, wrote it with help from his brother, Merv. Added are comments from old-timer clam diggers; many have now passed away. Rea Raihala, who has written stories for us before, sent us one written by a friend, Marilyn Grace Haugan Amey, about growing up in Seaside, her job at the Times Fountain, and her family and friends. Stan Simson's story is a reminder of the requirement of many men to adjust their life plans around the military requirement of the time that included a term in Viet Nam.

Please send us your stories. We will add them to our files to save them for future generations to read.

—The Editor

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Front Cover: CCHS image# 99.050.012
Sam Lee, a well-known clam digger in Seaside, stands with his catch beside his wagon with the Seaside pier in the background.

CUMTUX: Chinook jargon:
"To know…to inform"

The Asp (Asplund) family stories continue with the reminiscences of the youngest child, William, known by neighbors who described him as "the little one they never could do anything with." Although William quit school after the third grade, he did very well. Full of confidence and responsibility, he learned to work and have fun, meeting challenges others feared.

History of William Asp
An Autobiography

Stories of his life as told to his daughter, Velma Coulter

Late in my father's life, he made a tape recording of some of the memories of his early life. I will start with this taped account pretty much as he told it.

Tucker Creek Home

This is the story of my life and when I was born, and where I was born—about nine miles south of Astoria, Oregon, on a little creek called Tucker Creek. There were no roads out there. They traveled mostly by rowboat, nine miles to Astoria. When I was born on January 16, 1895, my mother had to be taken to the hospital right away because she had trouble.

Some people lived across the creek from us, and the lady took care of everything, and my oldest sister, Hannah, nine years older than I, helped. My father worked in Astoria, so he stayed there after he rowed my mother to town the nine miles. He then had to get a wagon and horses to take her from the landing on over into town to the hospital. She was there two weeks before she was able to come back home again. I was taken care of mostly by my oldest sister, Hannah.

My father built the house. I think he homesteaded this place. He felled a big old Douglas fir to get all the lumber. He sawed all the lumber out of it by hand, and then they had wood to burn for years. A lot of people came and got wood to burn from that tree because it was a dandy.

It was finally burned up by the people that lived across the creek from us. One of the married boy's wives wanted to get the thing away from the house. This big pitch burl must have been a huge thing because it burned for several days, and it almost burned their house down. It was a little too close to it, and he had quite a time getting it doused out so they could move it farther away from the house.

It was this old tree that made wood for, I think they said, about twenty years. How many people got wood from it, I don't know.

When I was two years old, we moved away from there, and into town, or the edge of it, so I didn't know who lived in it after that except Felix Carlson and his wife, years later, or moved onto the place and bought it so it is still there.

A good many years ago, we went out to that same place. I wanted to show it to Marie. Faith and Felix Carlson owned it and had a new house on it. We stayed there with them for a little while, and they showed us many things about the place.

Tucker Creek is just a small creek that comes into Youngs River, and Youngs River flows down into the Columbia right at Astoria.

Church Folks

My folks were quite religious and always took part in church activities. My father played the organ, and also my oldest sister. As I got older, I got to know the church people. They were all Scandinavians. They used to go out to Youngs River Falls, quite a way up the creek from us. At the falls there was a nice place for a picnic. They started using motorboats to go there as some of the men were fishermen. They'd haul a whole boatload of us up to the picnic grounds and then back in the evening. I had a lot of fun on those excursions, just one day, of course.

I was the youngest child there. My sisters were all older. Every summer, the Swedish Lutheran

CCHS IMAGE #23.118.012

A young Bill Asp. ca. 1912.

Church we belonged to went on picnics like that. Most of the time, it was up at Youngs River Falls.

My mother was the coffee maker. She had a big coffee pot and the first thing she'd do was to start building a fire and get it going—hot water and coffee. And everybody, I guess, furnished all kinds of different grub, I suppose. I don't remember. Of course, I was just a kid then. Anyway, it was awfully nice.

Logging

One of the summers, I don't remember which one, we went out to my uncle's logging camp. Charlie

CCHS Image #12184.102

Merv Smith clamming on the sand bar.

Forgive me if I left anyone out and for any misspelled names.

There were a lot of outlets for the thousands of clams these old-timers dug: Knapp on South Holladay, Seaside American cannery, and a small store in Gearhart, as well as Portland buyers. There were some more buyers in the Seaside area.

From the April 15, 1876 *Weekly Astorian*:
The experiment of fattening clams has been tried to good advantage. Place the clams in fresh water for a few hours so as to wash the sand from them; then pour off the water and add some fresh with a little salt, then sprinkle corn meal upon the water, and continue to add fresh corn meal every day for six or eight days, at the expiration of this time the clam will be quite fat and much more tender than before.

A Shower of Fish

Last week a small fish was left at this office, which was said to have fallen upon the street in a rain shower. We sent it to Mr. C. J. Smith of Brookfield, for identification. Mr. Smith was unable to classify it, but thinks it most resembles a small stickleback. He was not inclined to invest largely in the story of its having "rained down," but admitted that such a thing was not absolutely impossible as small animals are sometimes taken up by whirlwinds and waterspouts, and carried considerable distances. But this is not the time of year when such things are likely to occur. It is not possible, however for our informant to be mistaken; and in confirmation of his statement, we find the following in a Portland paper of Thursday last. *The Republican* says, "A lumberman named Rhodes, who resides in the neighborhood of Westport on the Columbia river came up on the Astoria boat yesterday evening and put up at the Minnesota house. He brought with him a pickle jar filled with five fish averaging an inch and a half in length, and of the genus orthagoriseus, of sun fish class. Mr. Rhodes says that about half past seven, a heavy dark cloud passed over his cabin, which is away from any stream or swamp, and of a sudden it commenced to rain heavily. A flash of lightning and a light clap of thunder were followed by a shower of fish, which kept coming down for about ten seconds. The little fellows kicked and squirled along the ground, and Rhodes succeeded in gathering up the jar full of live ones before they gave up the ghost. When seen last night they were swimming about as though their fall had not injured them at all. Mr. Rhodes left this morning for Eugene to present the jar to the faculty of the State University. The gentleman looks like an honest and unpretentious man, and asserts that his story is true and can be verified. We give it for what it is worth."

Courtesy of the artist, Don Nisbett

"Storm of December 2007" by Don Nisbett.
Originally printed in the Clatsop Community College publication, *Rain*.
See more of Don's work at his gallery in Ilwaco, Washington.